



LEC Hours & Contact:

Open Monday-Saturday
212-343-1234 x2438
lectutors@mcny.edu
75 Varick St. NY, NY

Luminaria

Volume 3, Issue 1

Summer 2007

Written, edited, designed, and distributed by the staff of the Title V / LEC.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE TITLE V LEARNING ENHANCEMENT CENTER

FEATURED STUDENT



Student of the Semester: Robert Burch

Robert has been coming into the LEC since January 2007, and he has proven to be a dedicated, enthusiastic student with an outstanding work ethic. He is in Purpose II in the School of Human Services; however, he has over twenty years of experience in the Human Services field. Robert has demonstrated marked improvement in his application of mathematical concepts – he is always seeking to connect his coursework with the outside world and realizes that math is essential to the spirit of the purpose-centered curriculum. Robert has also learned to formulate a clear thesis, to organize an essay, and to improve his writing mechanics and prose style.

STUDY SHOWS IMPROVED RETENTION AMONG LEC STUDENTS

One of our main goals at the LEC is to create an environment suitable for the promotion of independent learning. When students visit the LEC to make an appointment for a one-on-one tutoring session, they have in some way demonstrated an important characteristic of an independent learner by showing initiative.

In our observation, students that demonstrate the keenness to develop as independent learners go beyond this first step by taking onus for their learning, staying motivated, and seeking the guidance of the tutors without looking at the LEC as an easy fix-it place. The emergence of independent learning cannot be seen in isolation and has to be viewed within specific learning contexts as these students hone their numeracy and literacy skills.

While studying learning processes involved, it is clear that one of the many ways to identify the emergence of independence is a noticeable decrease in the degree of dependence on the tutor to solve things while developing a judicious understanding for knowing when and how to seek the guidance of the tutor.

Since its inception, the LEC has tried to facilitate a process for students to take charge of their own learning in a few different ways:



Dr. Jaya Kannan, Academic Coordinator,

1. Using learning goals contracts that enable students to create goals for themselves.
2. Guiding students to create individualized goals that are measurable.
3. Having students set their own pace of learning by choosing the frequency of visits and expectations.
4. Encouraging students to come prepared with questions to ask or ideas to discuss that guide them in using self-assessment as a tool for learning.
5. Using effective questioning techniques that create opportunities for the students to take greater onus for their learning.

Message From the Director



William Bird-Forteza

After a short hiatus during the spring semester, *Luminaria* is back. This issue constitutes the transition toward an emphasis on independent learning that will permeate all the LEC's work with students as indicated in Dr. Kannan's article. Three faculty members have written a piece each about their collaboration sponsored by Title V/LEC. In addition, students may find the articles on *Writing a Research Paper* and *Drafting Tips* useful when approaching a writing assignment.

The article on *Thinking Mathematically* may help some of us overcome biases about algebra and help appreciate its relevance to everyday problem solving.

The Learning Enhancement Center continues its growth and evolution. We moved to new quarters and invite you to come visit us. We have several Blackboard initiatives that will be launched in the very near future.

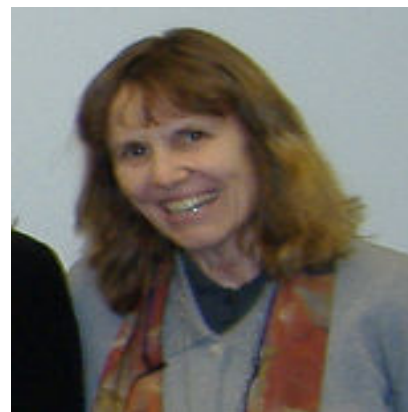
In addition, we are collaborating with another Title V initiative, the Coop Grant with Vaughn College, to develop a computer laboratory dedicated to math and science instruction at MCNY. We are happy to keep you abreast of ongoing projects at the LEC.

Welcome Educational Technologist Ryan

While browsing in the Teachers College Bookstore when I was a graduate student back in the 1970s, I came across a pamphlet entitled "A Course in Controlled Composition." I read the pamphlet with interest, mainly because the "Course" looked so short and simple. It consisted of applying a series of progressively difficult writing tasks – ranging from accurate copying to adding adverbial clauses – to a given set of short texts. I bought several copies of the pamphlet with the assumption that some day I would have the chance to implement the method.

My chance came with the opening of the Title V Learning Enhancement

Center last year. Preliminary research suggested that the method had been used successfully with ESL students and with adults seeking to polish their writing skills before entering the job market. Since a number of students at MCNY fit these categories, I decided to develop a pilot project to test the method. The small cohort of students who signed up for the program in October showed noticeable improvement in the accuracy of their writing after a few weeks. However, most of the participants were not able to attend regularly or to complete the course. Also, the experience of working individually rather than as a cohort may have made the process less compelling than a regular course.



Jinx Roosevelt, Professor

The pilot is still in its experimental stages. Any students wanting to improve their writing accuracy should contact the LEC or jroosevelt@mcny.edu

LEC: Who We Are, What We Do

By Larry Lutsky

During the fall 2006 semester, I incorporated the use of a wiki in my Critical Thinking and Writing course. During their final project, a formal public debate, students are asked to apply the critical thinking skills they have learned throughout the semester to a live situation. I asked students to share their research online and collaboratively write their opening statements for their respective teams on a wiki. This allowed students to collaborate on the project asynchronously. With all students contributing to the opening statement, they would collec-

tively determine their strongest arguments and how to support them. Students would then be able to come to the final debate with their opening "pre-flowed" and a sense of the major points of the debate. The students enjoyed using the technology, especially the fact that they could collaborate on a project without having to be physically together.

Some of the advantages of the wiki are that it is free and easy to navigate. While setting up the wiki can take some time depending on the number of linked pages and other formatting issues, a simple text-based wiki takes only a few minutes. Though wikis are free, the services they offer are limited. One must "update" to a fee-based wiki to do the type of



Lynn Sally, Professor

work that one may want to do in an academic setting. While there are a plethora of sites, we used PBwiki for this project, which can be found at www.pbwiki.com



Barrington Scott
Math Specialist

Here is the solution for the math problem posted in the last issue of Luminaria: Down payment on the house must be \$135,000.

As you all know, we cannot live in a world without negative numbers. For example, you receive a bank statement from a bank showing -\$124: this means you owe the bank \$124. Or you are getting ready to go to work, and the radio announcer states that the temperature is 30 degrees below 0: this means -30 degrees.

Signed rules for Addition:

- $(-) + (-) = -$ Add the numbers, then carry the sign.
- $(-) + (+) = ?$ Opposite signs subtract and carry the sign of the larger number.
- $(+) + (+) = +$ A positive plus a positive is a positive.

Multiplication and Division signed rules:

- $(-)(+) = -$ and $(-) \div (+) = -$ The product or quotient of opposite signs is negative.
- $(-)(-) = +$, $(+)(+) = +$ and $(-) \div (-) = +$, $(+) \div (+) = +$
- The product or quotient of same signs is positive.

The order of operations is: Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally, or
 Parenthesis → Exponent → (Multiplication + Division) → (Addition + Subtraction)
 Math Corner Challenge: Simplify $3(-2) - 4(-3 + (-4)) - 53$

Answer will be revealed in the next issue, but you can drop by LEC anytime to submit yours!

MATH

By Lisa

Resistant to jumping on the technology bandwagon, I have always believed that human interaction drives the educational experience. Yet, when asked to conduct a Title V Blackboard project, I took the opportunity. But did I really think this would impact my teaching practice? Well, let's just say I was skeptical.

After a semester of using Blackboard, I learned that it is nice to be wrong sometimes. First, using the technology added new dimensions to my courses. Students collaborated in learning and using the format, led online discussions, and those reticent in class found their voices in posting. Though overall pleased with the results, I was left pondering yet another theoretical question: Does Blackboard encourage *uncritical* thinking?"

My question is centered on rhetoric. I am concerned with how students post their ideas as "threads" or as response commentaries. Often resembling a long dialogue, the postings were more reactive than thought-out critical analyses. While students expressed their ideas, the process seemed to greatly differ from a dialectical synthesis of ideas, something that a composition/rhetoric teacher expects from the crafted essay. For example, for Plato (who wanted to banish writers from the republic altogether) dialogical and dialectical oratory is grounded in reason, the search for truth, and in the forum of the debate. As emotion means "motion out," e-language – that vast cyberland of blogging, mailing, instant messaging, and threading – is the outpouring of language. What, then, from a theoretical standpoint, is e-

language? How does it represent speech and writing? How does it fit into critical thinking or embody the oral tradition of which rhetoric is a part? These questions prompted me to trace the threads as a whole argument composed by the participants. In this regard, we can then examine with students the argument for its worth, while exploring more thoughtful, deeper analysis. Responses that pose problems in logic or reveal assumptions and feelings provide us with another basis for scrutinizing the reactive, reflective, and critical thinking. In this age of reaction, this venue can help some of us to become better thinkers. Moreover, Blackboard is a rich terrain to learn how technology impacts the thinking process and expression. I also learned that Blackboard is a research tool. I linked the New York Historical Society's complete "Slavery in New York"

exhibit. I then added e-books, links to slave narratives, critical articles on afro-centrism, and new developments in affirmative action legislation. Students can listen to "Strange Fruit" sung by Billie Holiday, and learn the history of the song. Thus, while I originally set out to enhance my courses, I now have an educational site that I will continue to enrich. Those of you, however, who have been using Blackboard, already know this!



Marilynn Navarro
Professor

Reading Comprehension

By Yasmine Alwan

Writing can be very challenging! Writers themselves find it a struggle at times (myself included). A struggle is not necessarily a bad thing—it can teach you a lot—but it need not be unpleasant. Here you will find some writing tips to develop your own writing process. Do stop into the LEC and tell us how your writing is going! We would love to help.

Use Prewriting Techniques

Before you set out to write your paper, use prewriting techniques (exercises) to think through what you would like to write about. Popular strategies include brainstorming, mapping, and free writing. Drop into the LEC for more explanation on these techniques.

Commit to Your Idea

Decide on your main idea, argument, or position—your thesis. A good thesis is specific enough, not too factual, and allows readers to anticipate your supporting ideas.

Make a Map

Rarely would you get into a car without knowing where you are going to go. Similarly, for your essay you will find it easier to have a plan, an outline. Your readers will appreciate this too. Many students do not take advantage of this strategy because they don't yet know exactly what "I am going to write until I write." The prewriting techniques discussed earlier can be very helpful in this regard—they can give you material to form an outline. Even if you know what you are going to write about, seeing your ideas, examples, and evidence on

paper can allow you to assess how well your paragraphs and points fit together. If you are more comfortable just writing a draft to explore your ideas, do it! Then use it to construct an outline. Outlines will not only save time; they will make your writing process easier.

Use Multiple Drafts

It is impossible for writing to come out perfect on the first round! Allow your first draft to be messy as you begin to connect and develop ideas. For your first edit, look for the quality of ideas and connections. For your second edit, aim to improve and correct sentences and particular words.

Develop Your Paragraphs

Be sure to develop the main point. A topic sentence will immeasurably strengthen clarity and focus. Be sure that your examples and supporting sen-

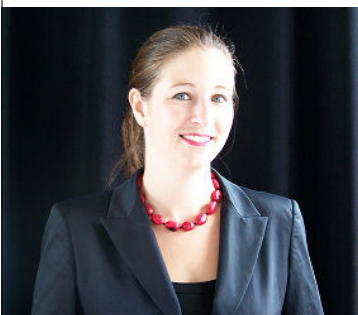
tences are specific and well-matched to your main point.

Allow Order to Help You

Some writers find it helpful to save the introduction and conclusion for the end of the process, when they have a more concrete understanding of their ideas.



Yasmine Alwan,
Writing Specialist



Lauren Cardon, Writing Specialist

Farewell to Bill

By Lauren Cardon

Students often find themselves confused – maybe even afraid – when confronted with a research paper assignment that requires the use of outside sources. We at the LEC are happy to help students brainstorm for topics, learn how to look for sources, and/or revise their papers. In the meantime, here are three useful tips for those of you just getting started:

1. A research paper is *not* a book report. You should not merely summarize your sources. Instead, you should establish yourself as an authority by taking a position on your chosen subject and *using* the source material to strengthen your argument. A research paper, in other
2. Be strategic in your searches for source material. Sometimes it's good to know your position and then search for journal articles; however, if you know your topic, looking at the material that's already out there can help you define a specific position on the topic.
3. Do not be deterred by material which takes a position contradictory to yours (unless you're not finding anything at all to back up your position). Such material can be useful. Think of your paper as your conversation with other professionals in your field. Not every-

words, is about *you* taking a stand on a topic and backing up your position.

one will agree with you, but sometimes a counter-argument can provide a chance for you to present your own viewpoint. It also shows that you've considered the other side.

4. It is not enough to quote or paraphrase source material or studies. You *must* analyze this material and show how it relates to your overall argument.

Please visit us at the LEC. Yasmine and I (the writing tutors) will be happy to help you with the research and writing; the math tutors, Lisa and Barrington, can help you with graphs and statistics.

Check out our wiki!

www.lecmetropolitan.wikispaces.com

Handy Links:

<http://iqmail.mcny.edu>
<http://iqweb.mcny.edu>
<http://blackboard.mcny.edu>

Coming soon from the LEC: BLACKBOARD LEARNING MODULES

Mathematical Thinking
Instructor: Lisa Bauer

Accuplacer Prep: Math
Instructor: Lisa Bauer

Accuplacer Prep: English
Instructor: Lauren Cardon

*Plagiarism: What Students
Need to Know*
Instructor: Yasmine Alwan

Accounting Study Guide
Instructor: Barrington Scott

Evaluating Internet Sources or Avoiding Plagiarism

Rochelle

"I don't understand why I have to learn algebra; it has no relevance to my life!" Sound familiar? Often students struggle with algebra because of their belief in its futility. I hope to demonstrate for you here that algebra is actually quite useful, and its application to your everyday life could be infinite.

For starters, let us examine the steps of solving an algebraic equation. First, you have to know the purpose of the equation (in most cases, the purpose is to solve for 'X'). Second, you have to break down each element of the equation to the most essential pieces of which it is comprised. After reducing the problem to its basic elements, and knowing what must be done (find 'X'), then you can reason your way to the best answer. Sometimes this involves a bit of trial and error; other times you can apply lessons learned from having solved algebraic equations in the past. At any rate, eventually you come to an an-

swer, that when you replace the term for X, the overall equation is true.

In life, we often encounter problems or difficult situations. Before we can address these concerns we must first establish what *must* be done. Then, we generally consider all of the variables surrounding the issue and break down the situation to its key factors. Sometimes we reason a solution that does not work; sometimes we use past lessons learned as a frame of reference. At any rate, we have just used an algebraic way of thinking to solve one of life's many challenges.

Often many of you have gone through this reasoning process, but in the language of mathematics something you have done again and again becomes unfamiliar and frightening. Thinking mathematically—and subsequently succeeding in mathematics—involves nothing more than reasoning with *clarity*

and *purposefulness*. The logic of algebra can be used as logic for life!

Stay tuned for an upcoming workshop on the Logic of Algebra!



Lisa Bauer, Math Specialist